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ABSTRACT

The African proverb, it takes a village to raise a child, seems increasingly fitting as problems and complexities of modern life impact the ability to provide healthy settings for the growth and development of children and youth. Psychology has a powerful contribution to make to the creation of "villages" which support and facilitate children's healthy psychological development. The community approach reflects the perspective that individuals are more likely to develop in positive ways when essential core conditions are in place. By infusing knowledge about human behavior, skills in applying this knowledge in specific contexts, and the problem solving processes that scientist practitioner psychologist uses, school psychologists can make a measurable difference in schools. Specific examples of the kinds of activities in which population centered school psychologist would engage include: (1) facilitating the development of interdisciplinary problem solving support structures in schools; (2) strengthening schools' capacity for data based decision making and evaluation of the effectiveness of programs; and (3) collaborating in the enhancement of learning and prosocial behaviors of all children, as well as in the development and implementation of classroom assessment and intervention strategies, based on research but adapted to the specific setting, when problems emerge. (JBJ)

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Chapter Fourteen

The School Psychologist as Citizen of the Learning Community

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The African proverb, it takes a village to raise a child, has seemed increasingly timely and fitting as the problems and complexities of modern life impact upon our ability to provide healthy settings for the growth and development of children and youth. But in our modern, often fragmented, society, what does the concept of "village" mean? Hillary Clinton (1996) suggests, that "it is less a geographic place where individuals and families lived and worked together" than the "network of values and relationships that support and affect our lives" (pp. 13-14). Understood that way, it becomes clear that psychology has a powerful contribution to make to the creation of "villages" which support and facilitate the healthy psychological development of all the children in our society.

Indeed, there is a history within psychology of "giving psychology away" at the community, as well as at the individual level. Within the mental health field in the 1960s, Gerald Caplan struggled to define and practice population-oriented psychology and psychiatry. His work embodied the idea that the mental health field should be oriented to the psychological needs of populations; our task is to "capitalize on our specialized knowledge of human nature to improve the lives of people who lived, worked, studied, prayed, socialized, or were being treated in such settings." Because of the enormity of the need, he encouraged this work being done largely through influencing "the way practitioners and administrators inside these organizations dealt with the people whom they served" (Caplan & Caplan, 1993, pp. 9-10). His vision of services reflected a paradigm shift from the focus of mental health practitioners on diagnosis and treatment of individual pathology, toward both prevention of pathology and empowerment of the members of the community. Along with the work of ecological psychologists and more recently, social constructivists, it is possible to conceptualize a world view in which psychologists collaborate with others to nurture healthy settings for growth and development, and in which problems related to development and learning are viewed in the context of the ecology in which they emerge.

Although school psychology has been affected by Caplan's work, his ideas have been less widely adopted in practice. In part this may be because historically, school psychology has tended to focus more intensively on the individual. Sarason (1981) describes American psychology as "quintessentially a study of the individual organism unrelated to the history, structure, and unverbalized world views of the social order" (p. 58). Accordingly, psychologists

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act as if really understanding the psychological structure of the individual provides the "means either for changing or for controlling or helping him" or her (p. 58). The so-called medical model, based on this world view, translates interpersonal and educational problems into the language of disorders. Individuals are seen as victims of these disorders, and professionals become the experts who assess and decide the problem and the label. This DSM type of approach, entrenched in the schools through the labeling processes of special education law, has resulted in enmeshing school professionals in diagnostic decision making and placement, and individual treatment options. A consequence of this focus has been not only to remove attention from conditions in the learning community which are pathogenic, such as classroom practices which foster learning problems, but also to limit the school psychology resources in addressing those conditions.

The community approach reflects the perspective that individuals are more likely to develop in positive ways when the essential core conditions are in place. It is, in part, a search for these core conditions in schools which has been the struggle for those engaged in school reform and restructuring initiatives. Much has been discussed about structural and technological reforms—and these areas do need to be addressed. But the essence of successful reform depends upon behaviors that result from restructuring the networks of values and relationships within individual classrooms and schools, "chiefly from the steady, reflective efforts of the practitioners who work in schools and from the contributions of the parents and citizens who support...education" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 135).

The critical question then is how school psychologists can make a significant contribution to the development of essential core conditions, a contribution that would make school psychologists positively indispensable to our school communities. By infusing knowledge about human behavior, skills in applying this knowledge in specific contexts, and the problem solving processes that scientist-practitioner psychologists use, school psychologists can make a measurable difference in schools. Specific examples of the kinds of activities in which population centered school psychologists would engage include (a) facilitating the development of interdisciplinary problem solving support structures in schools; (b) strengthening schools' capacity for data based decision making and evaluation of the effectiveness of programs; and (c) collaborating in the enhancement of learning and prosocial behaviors of all children, as well as in the development and implementation of classroom assessment and intervention strategies, based on research but adapted to the specific setting, when problems emerge. A brief description of these activities and some examples of how they have been conducted will illustrate the role of the school psychologist as a partner in building the learning community.

The School Psychologist as Facilitator of Interdisciplinary Teams

One of the major core conditions in restructuring schools is providing more opportunity and support for teachers and other school staff to develop collaborative work cultures. Given the stress and complexity of the teaching profession, problem-solving cultures and continuous access to professional development are necessary conditions for effective schools. A common theme in the restructuring literature is that in order to create "innovative and productive changes in the ways schools operate, the roles of all the stakeholders—parents, teachers, administrators, special educators, pupil personnel staff, and students—must be restructured to increase collaboration and problem solving among school personnel" (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996, p. 6-7). This, in turn, requires consideration of

interdisciplinary professional relationships and functioning within the schools and the communities they serve. Further, it has been found that implementation of research-based practices requires school cultures which provide opportunities for reflection and support for change.

One structure which supports collaborative problem solving is that of the school-based team (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). An emerging literature supports the use of teams, particularly interdisciplinary teams, in business, health, and educational institutions. However, much has also been written about the difficulty in developing effective teams in schools and the skills needed to create such structures (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996). The school psychologist, with knowledge of group process, interpersonal dynamics, consultation and collaboration, and change facilitation would be an indispensable member of a school interested in restructuring to a more collaborative learning culture.

In schools developing one type of support team structure, Instructional Consultation Teams (IC-Teams): (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996), for example, the school psychologists have been both effective team members and facilitators of the emerging IC-Teams. In close collaboration with their school principals, school psychologists have been involved in readiness activities in preparation for the implementation of the team, selecting team members, training the team, and team maintenance activities, as well as participating in the problem solving activities of the team. As members of the team, the school psychologists have developed a more ecological perspective toward student and teacher concerns. For example, when multiple students in a first grade class were referred by their teacher for evaluation as possibly handicapped, the team engaged in problem solving with the teacher about the instructional needs of the children. The team assigned a member to work with the teacher to obtain curriculum-based assessment information about the current academic skills of the children. Based on the assessment information, the teacher was supported in developing instructional strategies and materials that met the students' needs. One school district in Maryland has increased the number of school psychologists, the amount of psychologist time per school, and arranged budget priorities to support the team facilitation role of their school psychology staff. In large part, this change in resources arose because principals and parents at school board meetings and meetings with the superintendent supported the school psychologists in their role.

The School Psychologist as Program Evaluator

In the district described above, there was a second reason that the school board supported increasing the psychologists' participation in their school communities: the school psychologist responsible for the project had systematically collected powerful evaluation data on the results of the IC-Team project. The value of school psychologists can be enhanced when they are involved in program evaluation. Cost conscious decision makers are increasingly demanding evidence of results, and accountability has become a major challenge to schools, to maintain and enhance their fiscal integrity and in their relationships with their external stakeholders.

But beyond external demands for accountability, there is also an internal need for data to enhance decision-making, as the language and beliefs of total quality management and the continuous quality improvement movement are brought into the schools. As schools develop alternative service delivery options for at-risk students or for any group of students within their care, or adopt innovative practices, there is a legitimate need to determine whether they are making a positive difference. As school reforms are layered one on top of the other but in different combinations in different schools even within the

same system, it becomes increasingly essential to evaluate the effectiveness of change.

However, although data-based decision-making is becoming a mantra for state and school district administrators, the norms of most schools do not include reliance on data—internal or external—for problem solving or accountability, and skills in evaluation are often limited or unavailable at the school level. School psychologists are a school-based professional with access to the knowledge of evaluation. Traditionally, psychological evaluation has been focused on individual students; moreover, the lack of research by school psychologists (and other applied psychologists) is widely documented. However, inservice and preservice education could refocus the scientist-practitioner toward an emphasis on program evaluation which would provide indispensable information for school decision making. The application of clinical replication and small N research designs by school psychologists would provide meaningful data in schools adopting new programs in general education or for small groups of youngsters with special needs.

The School Psychologist as Facilitator of Academic Achievement

Perhaps the central issue in the current reform movement is the improvement of learning, most usefully when it is widely construed enough to include "intellectual, civic, and social development, not simply...impressive test scores" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 136). Schools struggle to meet high standards of academic achievement, often determined by state and national standards, and attempt to address concerns raised by the business community. There is a strong knowledge base in psychology that would be helpful to school personnel as they concentrate on improving academic achievement. However, this knowledge base is often only superficially understood by school personnel, who require assistance in the process of translating the instructional principles into day to day classroom activities. A good example of this problem is found in the assessment area. A critical principle of best practice in instruction requires that entry level skills of students be assessed within the ongoing curricula of the classroom, so that instruction is at the student's instructional level and academic engaged time can be maximized. But research documents that most teachers' classroom assessment skills have not been adequately developed in their preservice programs. Moreover, innovations based on research usually look very different when they are translated into actual classroom practice, and adaptations in innovations are often necessary as implementation is scaled up into new classrooms and schools. Unless the underlying principles are well understood, variations can be generated which are not congruent with the innovation's critical elements.

Thus there is a considerable instructional consultation role for school psychologists in the academic domain (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996), beyond the marginal one of testing students for disabilities related to learning problems. School psychologists should be collaborative partners with teachers in addressing a primary way in which the latter evaluate their own competence—the academic progress of their students. Knowledge of curriculum-based assessment/measurement strategies, and an indepth understanding of the instructional psychology principles that are the foundation for all good instruction provide an indispensable resource to the classroom teacher. The school psychologist can assist in problem solving in which instructional problems are viewed as teaching challenges, a process that can decrease the special education referral rate and increase the school's academic support system.

The School Psychologist as Agent of Socialization in Schools

A second major goal of schooling is the social

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and civic development of children and youth. This involves both creating settings which facilitate this development and resolving behavioral and interpersonal issues that students bring into the schools. It also includes coping with the challenging behaviors of a small number of students who disproportionately drain attention from learning and teaching. Many of these students are diverted through the special education process into programs for the seriously emotionally disturbed. Although school psychologists are involved in the labeling and placement process, there is typically less involvement in providing intensive services to these students, who often move into increasingly restrictive placements.

Strong concerns about challenging behaviors suggest a number of essential roles for behavioral specialists, such as school psychologists. Schools have a strong potential "to alter the culture of violence prevalent in American society" (American Psychological Association Task Force on Violence and the Family, 1996, p. 129) because of their access to children and families. Certainly schools are sites in which we can both:

> create services for the earliest possible identification and referral of children who show emotional and behavioral problems related to unusually high levels of aggression and provide these children with appropriate educational experiences and psychological interventions (p. 128) and:
>
> take the long view of violence prevention, ensuring that their curricula, administrative practices and interactions with students aim toward preventing the development of violent behaviors (p. 130).

An extensive array of school based and classroom based management strategies exist that could assist schools in meeting the challenges described in these recommendations. These include social problem-solving techniques, conflict resolution programs, and multiple other interventions designed to provide healthy interpersonal environments for all children, with some programs uniquely designed for coping with challenging behaviors. Since there is evidence that teacher and parent involvement in teaching social problem solving skills facilitates generalization of appropriate behaviors in students, school psychologists can maximize their influence by co-leading groups with teachers and parents.

But in addition to bringing specific, research-based programs into schools, there are examples of creative site-based interventions. In a school in which students trashed a boys' bathroom, the students who perpetrated the incident were involved by the school psychologist in a major clean up of the bathroom and the school, an intervention based on overcorrection. This intervention increased the children's investment in their school, and they continued working together—at their request, to paint the bathrooms and hallways, and clean up the graffiti on the exterior walls of the school. Elsewhere, a school psychologist worked with an elementary school principal and teachers on a school-wide concern about challenging behaviors of the students. They developed a data base on office referrals by teachers, and discovered that a small cadre of nine students out of over 700 made up the predominant source of troubling behavior referrals. They determined that school-wide procedures for office referrals were not being consistently implemented. New procedures were designed to ensure consistent implementation, and they developed processes to ensure that the students with the most challenging behaviors received appropriate intervention. Accountability and data collection on the individual and school level were helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention design.

Restructuring School Psychology

Currently there are school psychologists who

are functioning as essential partners in building learning communities in schools, and others struggling to find ways to include more of such activities. Many school psychologists who would like to function in this role need additional training in some particular aspects: learning how to facilitate team development, building program evaluation skills, and developing the competence to more effectively give away psychology's knowledge base in instruction, classroom management, and healthy social interaction. Not all school psychologists may be equally effective in these areas, but differentiated staffing and interagency collaborations may provide access to skills which an individual school psychologist may lack. Perhaps, most of all, many school psychologists need to be able to advocate more effectively for this role with school administrators and not automatically accept that they will not be allowed to engage in these activities. Some of this perception is accurate, however, and organized psychology needs to advocate even more effectively for this role as well.

Building a "village" for the benefit of all members is a worthy challenge and goal. The school psychologist must be an essential partner in building a healthy environment for all the residents, because we provide access to the domain of psychology. In broadening our participation in the learning community, we maximize our contribution to the development of our most precious members, the students.

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